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# PINCHOT INSTITUTE FOR CONSERVATION

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**Statement of  
V. Alaric Sample  
President  
Pinchot Institute for Conservation  
before the  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Agriculture  
June 22, 2005**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to testify before you and the other members of the House Committee on Agriculture regarding the centennial of the US Forest Service. I currently serve as the President of the Pinchot Institute for Conservation. The Pinchot Institute is a nonprofit center for research, education and technical assistance on matters relating to natural resource conservation and sustainable forest management. The Institute was dedicated in 1963 by President John F. Kennedy at Grey Towers National Historic Site in Milford, Pennsylvania. Grey Towers is the former home of Gifford Pinchot, founder and first Chief Forester of the US Forest Service. Through the generosity of the Pinchot family, Grey Towers National Historic Site is now the home of the Pinchot Institute, as part of a successful and productive partnership with the US Forest Service stretching over more than 40 years.

On the occasion of the centennial of the establishment of the US Forest Service in 1905, this Committee has asked me to reflect upon how the agency has performed in its first century, and what I believe will come of the agency in the next. Given the time available, my observations will be very general, of course, and cannot do justice to the agency's accomplishments and prospects that are provided through numerous more scholarly studies that have been published in recent years. The US Forest Service came into being because the nation needed such an organization, and the Forest Service fulfilled that need with style and distinction. Over the past hundred years, the US Forest Service has risen to new and often unanticipated needs, with dedication and a commitment to serving the common good of the nation—what founding Chief Gifford Pinchot referred to as “the greatest good, for the greatest number, in the long run.”

*Leadership in Forest Conservation Thought, Policy and Action*



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## **Past performance**

The work of the Forest Service has been a source of debate and occasional controversy, from the day it was created, right up until the present. This is to be expected in an agency attempting to balance the competing and often conflicting interests of a diverse and staunchly democratic nation, over resources as valuable and productive as the National Forest System. If we Americans are fortunate, we will still have the privilege of debating with one another for yet another hundred years, over the best use of the National Forests. The important thing is that, thanks to the vision of the founders of the National Forests, and a century of stewardship by the US Forest Service, these lands and resources will still be conserved and sustainably managed, for future generations as well as those that have gone before.

Since the US Forest Service was established by Congress through the Transfer Act of 1905, the agency has successfully met every major challenge with which it has been faced. Some of these challenges have been formidable.

While the Forest Service was still young and relatively inexperienced, it was galvanized into action by the devastating wildfires of 1910, which burned millions of acres in Montana and Idaho, destroyed numerous communities, and cost hundreds of lives. In response, the Forest Service virtually invented many of the wildland firefighting techniques and technologies used all over the world. As we know today, the Forest Service was almost too successful in taming wildfires. Through research on the important roles that fire plays in the ecological functioning of forests and grasslands, the Forest Service is discovering new ways to appropriately reintroduce fire into forest landscapes now made more complex by the shifting boundaries of wildlands and urban communities.

When the necessity arose, the Forest Service helped meet the need for wood, first to help ensure victory in the second world war, and later to meet the surging demand for housing during a post-war economic expansion that lasted well into the 1960s. As with firefighting, the Forest Service was almost too successful in wood production, and were slow to respond to changing needs and social values, and to new science that brought a deeper understanding of the effects of timber harvesting on wildlife, water quality and other important forest values. The Forest Service endured sometimes intense public criticism, and lost some of the luster it enjoyed when it was widely regarded as the most successful, effective and respected agencies in all the Federal service.

In going from youth to maturity over the past century, the Forest Service has picked up its shares of the nicks and scrapes that come with age and experience. But like the marks in fine leather, these are proof of authenticity. It is not in the personality and culture of the Forest Service to shy away from the difficult challenges. Like people, organizations that have never failed at anything are organizations that have not tested themselves, not put themselves on the line, and not attempted bold steps in hopes of making significant progress. At the end of its first century, the Forest Service still stands as a model to the rest of the world, generating new forest science to address an

array of new challenges to the well-being of forests, providing technical assistance to other forest owners of all kinds, and demonstrating forest management that, in spite of the current crop of issues, is a model of sustainable forest management.

### **Future prospects**

The US Forest Service is now serving an America greatly changed from a century ago—from a population of 76 million in 1900 to 286 million today; from mostly rural and agricultural to 85 percent urban and industrial; from mostly western European ancestry to a diverse mix of races, cultures and outlooks. The people of the United States need the National Forests and a strong, effective US Forest Service today more than at perhaps any time since the agency's establishment.

Global market forces have fundamentally changed forests and forestry in the US, and will continue to do so in the next two to three decades. Forestry, like every other segment of our economy, has been profoundly affected by economic globalization. Forest industry has consolidated and greatly increased its foreign direct investment (FDI) in developing parts of the world, bringing down prices for consumers, but also making it less economical to grow wood in the US, or even to own and manage forest land. Billions of dollars in capital once invested in US forests have been taken out and reinvested in fast-growing plantations, mostly in the Southern Hemisphere. Production capacity in the global forest sector, including US-based companies, has geared itself toward rapidly growing markets in Latin America and Asia.<sup>1</sup>

With timber prices in the US projected to remain relatively flat for many years to come, there is no business case to be made for new investments by the forest products industry in US timberlands. Several leading US forest economists recently stated that even the well-managed Douglas-fir forests on corporate timberlands in the Pacific Northwest—some of the most valuable and productive forests in the US—will barely be able to compete on price or quality with low-cost wood coming from Southern Hemisphere plantations. We will continue to see US companies divesting their timberlands by the millions of acres in order to deploy that capital more effectively in forests elsewhere in the world.<sup>2</sup>

### **Implications for US forests**

What does this mean for the US Forest Service, and indeed for all forests in this country? First, the biggest threat to sustaining America's forests is not from pressure for timber harvesting. Timber harvesting on the National Forests is a tenth of what it was two decades ago. And while markets remain weak even for timber on private lands

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<sup>1</sup> National Commission on Science for Sustainable Forestry. 2005. Global Markets Forum: Summary Report. NCSSF: Washington, DC.

<sup>2</sup> Binkley, C., Aronow, M., Washburn, C., and New, D. 2005. Global Perspectives on Intensively Management Plantations: Implications for the Pacific Northwest. *Journal of Forestry* 103(2): 61-64 (March).

that is far more accessible and generally of higher quality and form, it is highly unlikely that we will see any pressure for increased harvest levels on National Forests from the major forest products companies in the US. Demand will continue to come primarily from smaller regional firms serving regional forest products markets.

The biggest threat to sustaining biological diversity, water quality, wildlife and other values from US forests will be the loss of the forest altogether, to forest fragmentation and the conversion of forest land to development and other nonforest land uses. Three-quarters of US forests are privately owned, which means there are costs to the owners—property taxes, severance taxes, estate taxes, and inheritance taxes, as well as the expense of protecting and managing the forest. These costs are increasingly difficult for many private forest owners to bear, especially in times of weak timber markets and declining real prices. As a result, more and more forest land each day is being cleared for development and, for all intents and purposes, lost forever as forest.

When we lose an acre of forest, we are losing far more than its productive potential to grow wood on a sustainable basis in perpetuity—though that is enough. America's forests are its greatest single guarantor of adequate supplies of clean water for agricultural, industrial and municipal purposes. The public value this represents is almost incalculable, though some recent examples—such as New York City's avoiding an estimated \$8 billion in drinking water treatment costs by better protecting its forested watersheds upstate—give some hint of the magnitude of values at stake.

These forests represent other important public values as well—habitat for wildlife of all kinds, including many rare and local species; opportunities for hunting, fishing and many other recreational activities that are important not only individuals but to local economies. Just as Gifford Pinchot could not have imagined some of the values that we find important on the National Forests today, there are surely other important functions and values that forest ecosystems provide that we do not yet recognize. These values may not become apparent to us until they have been lost, and are then irreplaceable at any price.

Through critical efforts like the Forest Legacy Program, the US Forest Service is cooperating closely with state governments, local communities, and forest landowners to ensure that landowners can continue to “keep their forests in forest,” and continue to provide the steady stream of public benefits, values and uses that we are only now beginning to fully appreciate.

The US Forest Service will continue to play an essential role in helping landowners to conserve and sustainably manage their forests, as they have for decades. Cooperative programs with state governments and universities aid forest landowners with technical assistance, research and cost-sharing programs for insect and disease control, fire protection, invasive species control, habitat conservation, water quality, and the development of new markets and sources of income. Like the public conservation values that these state and private forestry programs protect, we cannot take them for

granted, fully realizing their contributions to the nation's public interest only after they are gone.

## **Implications for National Forests**

Confronting these enormous challenges to protecting important public conservation values on private lands brings a fuller appreciation for the value of the National Forests themselves, and the array of services and uses they provide for all Americans on a daily basis.

Currently, the public spends an average of less than \$16 per acre annually to conserve and sustainably manage 192 million acres of National Forest, providing benefits to all Americans, and ensuring that this essential natural resource asset will still be here for generations of Americans yet to come. By any measure, the public is getting good value from their investments in the US Forest Service.

Communities adjacent to National Forests get especially good value. They are the most direct beneficiaries of the clean water, recreation resources, wildlife, and other values that contribute to the local economy and quality of life. The expenses for protecting and managing these local resources are shared with 286 million Americans, 85 percent of whom live in metropolitan areas and may never actually step foot on a National Forest. There are challenges for local communities, especially in working with National Forest managers to maintain a balance of uses, but for most communities, proximity to a National Forest continues to be an enormous economic and environmental asset that should not be taken for granted.

The National Forests, though publicly owned, have not been immune to the effects of changes in the global markets in the forest sector. The decline in US timber values and markets has contributed to the loss of the economic infrastructure for forest management in communities all over the country, making it difficult for the Forest Service to accomplish its most basic stewardship responsibilities: maintaining the long-term health and productivity of the forests themselves, and the broader ecologic, economic and social context in which they exist. We have seen this in the increase in insect and disease outbreaks, and the buildup of hazardous fuels, especially on National Forests in the intermountain West. Less apparent but no less serious is the steady deterioration of an extensive system of unpaved roads, many of them on steep slopes and erodible soils, that have not been maintained as designed, and are degrading water quality in some of the same rivers and streams that are so important to salmon habitat, or habitat for endangered aquatic species such as bull trout.

In response to the declining timber harvest levels starting in the late 1980s, the Forest Service developed, tested, and proved new policy mechanisms to allow Federal natural resources agencies to contract for land stewardship services. These stewardship contracts enabled agencies to develop contracts—multi-year, multi-task and end-results oriented—that allowed agencies to address ongoing land stewardship needs, while

providing a more reliable basis for communities to invest in a sustainable economic infrastructure.

The US Forest Service is increasingly recognizing that reliability of raw material supply is as important as volume, and that it is the key to supporting sustainable economic development on local communities. Using new policy tools now under development, the Forest Service will work in closer cooperation with managers of neighboring federal, state, tribal and private forest lands to collectively provide a more stable, reliable supply of raw materials as a basis for private reinvestment in local communities and economies.

Increasingly, these investments are focused as much on energy as on wood products. The changes taking place in today's global energy markets are far more fundamental than in the short-term energy crisis of the early 1970s, and portend a long-term shift in US approaches to development of domestic energy supplies, energy-conserving technologies, and renewable energy resources.

This will create many new challenges for the US Forest Service, to accommodate energy development on National Forests without unacceptable impacts on other forest resources. But it may also represent important new opportunities for biofuels development, and the creation of new markets and resource values that can help support land stewardship activities. In many ways, the future challenges and opportunities in forest management will be determined as much by national security and energy policy as by traditional forest policy.

### **Lessons learned**

An assessment that offers no suggestions for improvement is no assessment at all, since there is always room for any individual or institution to improve. In its first century, the US Forest Service has made its share of mistakes and misjudgments. Some of these, such as its unpreparedness for the 1910 fires in the northern Rockies, galvanized the agency into action and helped make it one of the most respected and admired of all public agencies of the time. Others, such as the agency's response to the public controversy over clearcutting on the National Forests in the 1970s, cost the US Forest Service dearly in terms of its credibility with the public and with Congress. Public trust and confidence are invaluable assets to any organization that, once lost, are only slowly regained. In many communities across the country, the Forest Service is still rebuilding the public trust it once had, and it has further to go in some communities than in others.

Changes will be needed to equip the Forest Service to face new challenges and emerging threats to the conservation and sustainable management of forests. The Forest Service's "process predicament" is well known, and the agency has yet to take full advantage of authorities it already has to reduce process barriers to effective forest management. Decentralized decision making historically has been one of the Forest Service's greatest strengths, and a reversal of the centralizing tendency of its policy and

planning processes over the past several decades is needed. Local forest managers must have the authority to make timely and reliable decisions that fit the local situation, while still operating within a general policy framework that ensures that the long-term national interest in the productivity of these natural resources is protected. Cost-cutting measures that result in the closing of local offices such as ranger districts only put more distance between the Forest Service and its local communities, making it more difficult for the Forest Service to understand local circumstances, and increasing the likelihood that mistakes will be made. To some extent, this is an internal question of resource allocation within the Forest Service, but it is also a question of increased Congressional support that will provide the Forest Service with the resources it needs to sustain important working relationships with local constituents.

Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth has outlined what he regards as the four major threats facing US forests: wildfires, invasive species, unmanaged recreation, and forest fragmentation. Fortunately, the US Forest Service does not have to take on these challenges single-handedly. Over the past century, substantial capacity has developed within state and tribal governments, forest industry, private landowner associations, and nonprofit public interest conservation organizations. The independent, “can-do” culture of the Forest Service has served the nation well in the agency’s first century, but the challenges of the next century cannot be met in the same way. The Forest Service is striving to develop the tools and perspectives needed for the agency to work in more effective partnerships with cooperating organizations, from the national level to local communities. If the Forest Service’s own success is to be judged by the extent to which emerging conservation challenges are addressed, then it has no choice but to learn to work in close cooperation with other public, private and nonprofit organizations that may not be content to cede leadership to the Forest Service alone.

The Forest Service has for a century been a leader in forest conservation. It is now learning new approaches to leadership, based on enabling and equipping Americans of all kinds to take steps that will ensure the sustainability of our forest resources through increased understanding of forests in their ecological, economic and social context. Given the magnitude of the challenges facing America’s forests, and the fact that three-quarters of the country’s forests are in private ownership, mastering this kind of facilitative approach to fostering personal responsibility and individual action will be essential to the Forest Service’s continued leadership.

## **Conclusion**

At the end of the day, the US Forest Service is still the most capable organization in the world in the conservation and sustainable management of forests. Forest Service Research and Development has helped create much of the scientific basis for forest protection and management, and is still leading the way in addressing new scientific challenges such as controlling invasive forest pests and pathogens, or understanding the potential impacts on our forests from global climate change. Its periodic national-level assessments provide an essential snapshot of the conditions and trends in our forests,

and serve as the basis for an ongoing national dialogue on progress achieved and improvements needed.

Forest Service State & Private Forestry is striving to meet the evolving challenges to conservation and sustainable forest management on private lands, creating innovative approaches to making forest stewardship economically viable in the long run. The US Forest Service's remarkable ability to work with state and local governments to foster continued public benefits from private forest lands while respecting the Constitutional rights associated with private property is having a positive and constructive influence on countries such as China, which is only now deciding what private property rights should be held by an individual, and developing countries in other parts of the world that do not have the history that the US does for protecting land tenure rights of all citizens rich or poor.

Similarly, the Forest Service's management of the National Forest System continues to be an inspiration to developing countries that are pressed to utilize their natural resource assets in order to support economic growth and raising their standards of living. It was only a century ago that the US was itself a developing country, a blink of an eye in terms of world history. Yet with the foresight and commitment of Gifford Pinchot and his contemporaries, the US was able to make the transition from unsustainable forest exploitation to sustainable forest management, and avoid much of the long-term deforestation that has plagued other countries and ultimately impeded their economic progress. Our National Forest System provides a model institutional, legal and policy framework that can be adapted to the particular biophysical, economic, cultural and political characteristics of other countries around the world.

The Forest Service of the future will face many new challenges, some of which we can't even anticipate. At the start of its second century, the Forest Service has matured as an organization, and internalized the lessons from its mistakes as well as its successes, and is stronger as a result. Whatever may come in the decades ahead, the US Forest Service has a strong foundation on which to build. It will meet the challenges of the future as it has addressed each of its challenges in the past—with unparalleled expertise and a commitment to what the Forest Service's first Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot described as "the greatest good, for the greatest number, in the long run."

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be happy to address any questions that you or others members of the Committee may have.